

From sacred to secular: *Baruk* architecture on secular buildings in Sarawak

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Abstract. The Bidayuh people of Sarawak are known for their *baruks*. A *baruk* is often observed as having a round form with a conical roof that has various functions such as a courthouse, a meeting place and a residence for the male adolescents. These are all secular purposes built around its religious functions, constructed based on their traditional beliefs that qualify it to be considered as a sacred building. Recently, the pursuit for fulfilling political and commercial objectives has made the architecture of *baruks* to be copied onto various secular buildings in Sarawak, ranging from a visitor centre to a governmental building. Despite much have been praised as an attempt to revive this endangered architecture, applying its language onto contemporary secular buildings sparks a debate whether the sacredness of the original *baruks* are respected or is it just a cultural commodification. This paper attempts to justify the adaptation of *baruk* architecture into secular buildings. It is discussed through a grounded theory approach, with the methods used were in the form of literature review and on-site observations. This paper suggests the extent of applying *baruk* sacred architecture into secular buildings should be observed, allowing more potential discussions in the academia pertaining adaptation of sacred indigenous architecture in contemporary buildings.

Keywords: Baruk, Bidayuh, secular building, sacred building, Neo-Vernacularism

1. Introduction

The new Sarawak State Legislative Assembly (SSLA) building is located just a few hundred meters opposite of the Kuching Waterfront, standing far enough by the river to signify the might of the Sarawakian people and their belief in the democratic system [1]. Designed by Hijjas Kasturi and completed in 2009, it is intended to be an icon - a testament to Sarawak's bold vision for the future. This building resembles what the local lay public might be familiar with – consciously echoing architectural characteristics of a *baruk*, a special community hall and a sacred place for the Bidayuh ethnic group [2]. The conspicuous *baruk* form reflects the institution as the oldest state legislative assembly in Malaysia [1]. It is one of many contemporary architectural pieces in Sarawak that echoes the image of this sacred building.

